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ABSTRACT

This paper details plans for implementing a European units/credits system for modern languages in adult education. Included are a discussion of the rationale for such a system, the aims of its planners, the language learning objectives to be established for the courses, means for individualizing the program to meet the needs of each adult learner, and linguistic theory as related to the instruction of modern languages to adults. By units/credits system is understood a study framework in which a given subject matter is articulated into elements which can be grouped in different ways by different classes of learners in accordance with their needs and interests. Intelligent choice is then possible, and can perhaps be encouraged by recognizing some coherent combinations of elements as constituting "units" of study. Where the mastery of such a unit is relevant to the acquisition of some formal qualification, "credits" can be awarded. A system of this kind appears to offer a promising framework for guidance combined with freedom and flexibility in the, at present, badly unstructured field of adult education. (Author/HW)

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Draft outline of a European units/credits system
for modern languages learning by adults

by

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1.1.1. The divisive effect of language differences seems certain to prove to be one of the major obstacles to European integration over the next generation.

1.1.2. In recent times language-based nation-states have provided a favourable environment for a steadily increasing scale of social organisation. The process has been greatly furthered by mass education and the spread of standard national languages, which make all citizens members of a freely interacting community and facilitate the further development of large-scale activities and institutions of all kinds.

1.2.1. Today, the internal consolidation of our countries is far advanced. However, the major developments of the last thirty years have progressively weakened the self-sufficiency of national cultures, even in day-to-day living. Mass travel for business and pleasure over continental motorway networks and air routes, electronic media, mass movements of immigrant labour and at managerial level in multinational corporations, supranational economic, cultural and political institutions, interdependence of imports/exports in an increasingly unified market, all conspire to render hard national frontiers within the Council for Cultural Co-operation area increasingly obsolete.

1.2.2. The discrete separation of national languages no longer provides a framework for increasing internal integration, but rather hindrances to an increasingly real and urgent wider unity. For children born today, who will spend the greater part of their lives in the Third Millennium, monolingualism will become increasingly out-of-date in a world where an active knowledge of an international lingua franca and some receptive acquaintance with one or two others, will be required over an unpredictably wide range of social situations. The effective teaching of languages in schools is thus a matter of great urgency, which, as so often in transitional situations, is widely underestimated.

1.2.3. Young adults, however, and the early middle-aged, have completed their full-time education, in most cases (especially that of working-class children in the large monolingual countries) without acquiring any effective knowledge of any language save the standard form of the mother tongue. It is to be expected that very substantial numbers of them will find themselves at a disadvantage at some point in their future lives by an inability to communicate with fellow Europeans of a different mother tongue.

1.2.4. The extent of the disadvantage may range from the relatively trivial (inability to greet a visitor, to understand an entertainment film, to ask the time of a passer-by) to the disastrous (inability to summon help in sudden emergency, to retrieve a key piece of information from a publication, to negotiate a serious conflict of interest, to take employment in another country).

1.3.1. This situation gives particularly clear support to the general argument for a "permanent education". Modern life develops faster than educational planning can predict, or, having predicted, make effective provision for. A substantial proportion of educational resources should therefore be reserved for enabling the disadvantaged adult to acquire the knowledge and skills he now requires but which did not form part of his full-time education.

1.3.2. The knowledge and skills needed, often at short notice, by the adult will not, in most cases, be the highly generalised ones appropriate to the full-time education of the child and adolescent before the "career watershed" is reached. Within a life and career, the main lines of which are already laid down, the possibilities of action are limited. Adults rarely are able, or wish, to undertake the thorough study of an extensive new area of knowledge as a whole, in all its aspects. They rather require, on the basis of a sound grasp of necessary fundamental principles, to acquire quickly the factual knowledge and practical skills necessary for the immediate performance of urgent tasks with which they are faced in various aspects of their committed lives.

1.3.3. This is not to preach a narrow vocationalism. The recreational and liberating value of cultural studies is not to be underestimated. Even in these studies, however, the interests and motivations of the adult are generally more concentrated, related to a more defined pattern of past experience and future expectations.

1.3.4. Given such a concept of the nature and objectives of adult education, the transfer to this field of a pattern of generalised courses and global examinations developed for the schools is inappropriate. A better study framework can be provided if a given subject matter can be articulated into elements which can be grouped in different ways by different classes of learners in accordance with their needs and interests. Intelligent choice is then possible, and can perhaps be encouraged by recognising some coherent combinations of elements as constituting units of study. Where the mastery of such a unit is relevant to the acquisition of some formal qualification, credits can be awarded, allowing the qualification to be gained in a variety of ways appropriate to varying, but congruent, patterns of study and needs.

1.3.5. A units/credits system of this kind appears to offer a promising framework for guidance combined with freedom and flexibility in the at present badly understructured field of adult education.

2.1. The aim of the European units/credits system for modern language learning by adults is therefore to establish a framework for adult language learning, based upon the language needs of the learner, and the linguistic operations required of him in order to function effectively as a member of the language community for the purposes, and in the situations, revealed by those needs.

2.2. This aim is to be achieved by (a) an analysis of language use sufficiently rich for widely divergent learning objectives to be characterised and (b) a set of principles according to which language learning units may be constructed, corresponding to the communicative needs of the learner. Suggestions may then be made whereby "credits" may be attached to such units, and given appropriate recognition on a European basis.

2.3.1. The classification of language learning objectives is based upon an analysis of the language-using operations required of a member of a speech community. Each operation can be described in terms of (a) the behavioural input-output chain involved, (b) the communicative function performed, (c) the notional/semantic content expressed, (d) the formal linguistic resources employed, (e) the situation in which it occurs. These dimensions of classification may be detailed as follows:

2.4.1. Behavioural This classification is exemplified by Trim (CCC/EES (71) 135 pp. 52-54) and developed in detail in the report of Dr. Bung. Any linguistic operation can be seen

as an encoding, decoding or transformation. That is to say, a message is formulated in a language and then produced in a specific medium; or a message in a specific medium is identified, understood and interpreted in a language, or a message in a specific medium and in a specific language, having been identified, understood and interpreted, is then reformulated in a systematically related way in the same or a different language, and then produced in the same or a different medium (this use of the term "transformation" is, of course, to be distinguished from that in transformational generative grammar).

2.4.2. In this way, any linguistic operation by a speaker/hearer can be represented by a vector, or string of ordered numbers, of which the first represents an input, the last an output, and the intervening ones posited intervening activities in the chain (or, with a systematic ambiguity, overt message, underlying linguistic construct, deeper semantic structure).

2.4.3. This classification is exhaustive, in the sense that there are no linguistic operations which cannot be accommodated. It is thus a useful basis for operational descriptions. It is however, quite uninformative as to the functional, linguistic, semantic and situational characteristics of the message concerned, and must therefore be further specified in these respects.

2.5.1. Language functions have been discussed by Trim (CCC/EES (71) 135 pp. 55-56) and developed in detail by Wilkins (CCC/EES (72) 67 pp. 12-32). The categories developed under this heading combine freely with those under behavioural operation. Thus "reading a typewritten letter and replying to it by telephone" may involve the understanding of straightforward requests for factual information, and supplying that information in a compact form. It may, on the other hand, mean understanding legal phraseology and looking for indications of whether the writer is outraged, vindictive, opportunistic, etc., when threatening a lawsuit for damages, and replying in a firm but conciliatory way without admitting legal liability, in order to achieve a compromise settlement. A highly complex example like the second one, will break down into a succession of "moves" of a simpler character. The sentences of the letter will include some that assert a version of the event in factual terms, with others that make demands, express disapproval and anger, threaten, etc. Individual sentences may combine components, thus performing several of these functions at once. In the telephone conversation, surprise, disappointment, sympathy, concession, deprecation, scepticism, warning, persuasion, conciliation, agreement are deployed and combined in a communicative strategy.

2.5.2. These categories of communicative function do not claim to be exhaustive, rather exemplary and suggestive. Further research and experience will fill out and refine the present categories.

2.6. Conceptual categories are also developed by Wilkins (op. cit. pp. 3-12). Thus the legal dispute in the example as so far given is neutral as between, say, a physical assault, a newspaper attack, a traffic accident, supply of faulty goods, etc. The member of a language community, in order to perform the communicative functions required of him must be able to refer to events, things, places, ideas and the relations between them. Within a European context, cultural integration has progressed so far that the cultural content to which any language user has to refer varies within very narrow limits. The concepts necessary to communication may therefore be ordered and classified to some extent independently of the formal linguistic means by which they are expressed in particular languages.

2.7.1. However, while behavioural, functional and conceptual factors constrain the use to which the speaker/listener puts his linguistic resources, it is the system of the language itself, its lexicon, syntax, morphology, phonology, which defines the form of sentences and their interrelations in sound and meaning, and necessarily the central object of language learning. It is also especially problematic.

2.7.2. Until some 15 years ago, grammatical theory was concerned to establish a definitive classification of sentences and their constituent parts. In his early works, Chomsky showed convincingly that any attempt to enumerate sentences and to account for their properties by segmentation and classification alone must fail. While any given sentence can be parsed and analysed in terms of sub-parts and their arrangement, the set of sentences, being infinite and having moreover an infinity of structures, cannot be specified in this way. Members of a language community are constantly being called upon to produce or respond to sentences they have never heard before, and with a structure they have not met. They do so with no apparent difficulty. This ability cannot be simply ascribed to the sentence containing only sub-structures previously encountered, since that would be equally true of many non-sentences.

2.7.3. A grammar of a language, as a theory of that language, must therefore take the form of an abstract set of rules which introduce, arrange and embed categories into phrase structure, insert lexical items, rearrange, insert and delete elements to convert the posited deep structures into acceptable surface structures and finally convert these into a string of speech sounds with appropriate length, stress, and intonation (or, in writing, letters, punctuations and spaces).

2.7.4 This transformational-generative model of a grammar is now, with variations of varying importance, dominant, even commonplace. In 15 years, the basic arguments have not been effectively countered. An atmosphere has however developed hostile to taxonomic classifications in linguistics, and to attempts to use such classification as a basis for rationalisation in language teaching. Indeed, the emphatic contention that "highly abstract and highly specific principles of organisation are characteristic of all human languages", and "cannot be acquired through experience and training" can easily lead to an extremely pessimistic relativism in respect of pedagogic planning. Chomsky's celebrated address to the Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages in 1965 (reprinted in J.P.B. Allen and P. van Buren: Chomsky: Selected Readings OUP 1971) has been widely interpreted in this way. The editors themselves conclude: "As linguists, we find ourselves led away from an exclusive preoccupation with patterns of physical data in order to speculate about the internal logic of language structure, and the nature of the knowledge which enables a learner to achieve a creative control of language. As teachers, we are no longer interested solely in what a student says or writes; we are interested in using this physical evidence as a means of making inferences about what the student knows. In other words, we are no longer content merely because a student can give a correct response to a specific stimulus in a controlled repetition or substitution exercise; in addition, we want to satisfy ourselves that by giving the right response the student has really learned something about the language." As stated, this is unexceptionable, though it is doubtful whether the blinkered views attributed to linguists and teachers were ever seriously held, or that Chomsky's theory necessarily shows teaching on such a basis to be ineffective. Note, however, the effect of the words: an exclusive preoccupation with, solely, merely, in addition. While the validity of the argument (against an either/or view) depends in fact on these words, they place the behavioural approach in a negative light, allowing the interpretation: "What a person does is less important than what he knows" or even: "provided the learner knows the rules of the language, his performance as a speaker/listener is of little consequence". This conclusion would surely represent a seriously retrogressive step in education as opposed to attempts to realise the interdependence of theory and practice.

2.7.5. The above excursion seems necessary, since it would be foolhardy to erect a system which were to fly in the face of current linguistic theory. Fortunately there appears to be no basic contradiction. Generative theory does not assert the independence of competence and performance, but only that each is underdetermined by the others. As stated above, a classificatory apparatus can be developed, by means of which observed sentences

can be formally described. Though this does not constitute a theory of a language, it is useful for descriptive purposes as part of a wider framework. In addition, generative grammar posits that a grammar makes "infinite use of finite means". The lexicon is large, but finite and in principle listable, as are idioms and fixed collocations. Grammatical categories are relatively restricted in number, as are phrase constituents, aside from the results of the operation of recursive rules. The rules themselves are finite in number, and classifiable in terms of optionality/obligatoriness and productive yield.

2.7.6 There appears then to be no inherent reason (provided, of course, we avoid such obvious errors as that classification implies the learning of inventories seriatim) why a classification of "linguistic resources" should not be feasible, and perform the same functions within the units/credits system as the other dimensions of classifications. It will, however, be readily apparent that a great deal of further research will be needed to realise this objective. Meanwhile, the received categories of grammatical descriptions may still be used (e.g. as in van Ek (CCC/EES (72) 72, pp. 68-74)).

2.8.1. A particular speech event, characterised as to the type of behaviour involved, the communicative function, notional content and linguistic form, is set in a situational matrix.

2.8.2. The analysis of the "context of situation" was first closely studied by J.R. Firth (cf Synopsis of Linguistic Theory in Studies in Linguistic Analysis, ed. J.R. Firth, London 1957) and is developed in detail by R. Richterich (CCC/EES (72) 49, pp. 8-14). Richterich's categories are of (a) agents, characterised according to basic demographic features, the number involved, their social, psychological and locutionary roles, (b) time, i.e. time of day, duration, frequency and temporal sequence of actions, (c) place, geographical and topographical (e.g. open and enclosed spaces, public, private and professional environments).

3.1.1. The products of behavioural, functional, notional, linguistic and situational classifications combine to give a close specification of a minimal speech event, an irreducible operational quantum.

3.1.2. Such events rarely, if ever, occur in isolation, but in coherent chains over which some parameters are held constant. These claims form discourses (speaker and listener roles held constant), conversations (other situational parameters held constant, together with certain topic features and cumulative mutual presuppositions) and other complex operations. These complex operations, in which each participant employs a strategy to steer and control a course through a changing

situation, may be said to constitute the relatively independent operational modules of which our existences as members of language communities are composed.

3.1.3. The number of possible modules is indeed astronomic. While the requirements of coherence reduce the number greatly below any simple numerical product of category intersections to form quanta and their possible sequences, it is highly unlikely that any particular fully specified module is experienced more than once in a person's life, apart from the most basic of social routines (most formulaic utterances being quanta rather than modules).

3.2.1. It is obvious (as indeed from the argumentation in section 2. above) that to be a member of language communities is not simply to have ready-made modules at one's disposal. What then does it mean to be a member of a language community?

3.2.2. Linguistic theory is not yet sufficiently advanced for a single integrative theory of language performance to be instituted. We are therefore not in a position to specify exactly what it means to be a member of a linguistic community. We can however say that it involves the ability to act as a speaker/ hearer, that is to identify, understand, interpret and respond appropriately to utterances produced by fellow members of the community, and in turn to produce utterances which can be identified, understood, interpreted and appropriately responded to by them. These abilities presuppose in the member of a speech community: (a) a knowledge of the linguistic system in use in the community (i.e. of the formal and semantic properties of sentences), (b) mental skills (of an encoding and decoding character) in the formulation and perception of appropriate messages in real time, (c) motor skills in the articulation and catenation of sentences, (d) perceptual skills in the acoustic discrimination of utterances (or correspondingly the visual discrimination of print and handwriting), (e) a knowledge of the conventions governing the appropriate use of language situations, (f) an ability to recognise and respond appropriately to situations (and, particularly, changes in situations) which have a significant linguistic component and (g) a command of the necessary strategies to steer and control linguistic operations.

3.2.3. Taken together, these abilities and their presuppositions define the "communicative potential" of the speaker/listener. The aim of language teaching is to build up a communicative potential in the learner.

3.2.4. Native members of a speech community acquire their communicative potential in childhood, in the course of their socialisation and maturation. The native language becomes the major structuring factor in their mental life. Later, as a

result of second or foreign language learning, they may become members of one or more additional speech communities. They do so to a greater or lesser extent, but only rarely, if ever, does the further language they acquire play the same role in their lives as the native language, especially in respect of the structuration of mental life.

3.2.5. It seems highly unlikely that the aim of a "native-like" proficiency in a foreign language can ever be a realistic objective for more than a small professional elite working intensively for many years. Other classes of learner will necessarily achieve only a restricted competence and a limited proficiency. The central problem of language course planning is therefore how to achieve an optimal cost-effectiveness - how to produce the highest possible communication potential in the learner in relation to the resources deployed and expected conditions of use.

3.3.1. The variables in such a cost-effectiveness equation are of course many, with extensive "trading relations" between them. It appears that the following, at least, are involved: the communicative value of what is learned. This in turn has two main aspects: (i) referential and (ii) affective.

3.3.2. Referential value is established with regard to the speaker's ability to express "what is the case", to describe the real world in terms of events, things, people, places by means of formulated propositions. The key question for cost-effectiveness is here: How will the effectiveness of the speaker/listener's participation in social interactions be affected by his ability to produce, or respond to the linguistic item or category concerned? The answer will depend on several factors - the centrality or dispensability of the item or category in social life, the range and frequency of situations in which it is employed, the extent to which the same information can be conveyed by other means (contextual redundancy) etc.

3.3.3. By affective value is meant the value of the item, feature or category in communicating the emotions and attitudes of the speaker, or in directly establishing some social or psychological relation between speaker and listener. Again, cost-effectiveness requires us to enquire how the effectiveness of social interaction is affected by the speaker/listener's ability to produce or respond to the item, feature or category concerned. Again frequency, dispensability and redundancy largely determine the answer, which is, however, perhaps less easily calculable and more dependent on a wider view of the situation.

3.3.4. Productivity is the extent to which the particular feature, item or category learned is generalisable, and transferable to a range of further sentences. Thus a productive morphological affix (e.g. un-, ex-, -ness, -able) will have a higher productivity value than a particular lexical item (e.g. gold, cross, exact, etc.). Communication value and productivity determine the numerator of the cost-effectiveness formula.

3.3.5. Learning "cost" is the amount of resources, particularly time, to be expended in learning the item, etc., concerned. The value, which provides the denominator of the cost-effectiveness formula, depends on a number of factors, indirect and relative. Universals may be given a zero cost, which means that a great deal can be tacitly assumed, and included in language courses (and tests) without special teaching. How much we do not yet know. The learning cost of accidentals depends on both inherent and relative factors.

(a) The inherent factors may be dealt with first. They include:
(i) the arbitrariness of the sound-meaning relation. This requires rote learning and is highest in the case of simple morphemes and tagnames and quite high in that of most idioms;
(ii) the formal complexity of the structure to be learnt;
(iii) the conceptual complexity of the semantic content.

(b) Relative factors: (i) the degree of similarity between the expressions in the native and target language; (ii) the prior knowledge of the target language possessed by the learner.

3.4.1 The importance of the analysis of projected learner needs for a proper cost-effectiveness or cost-benefit assessment will now be apparent.

3.4.2. Within the framework of a permanent education, for example, very different roles are ascribed to initial full-time education and subsequent education. The first should not invest in techniques which are subject to high obsolescence, but concentrate on the deep understanding and mastery of permanent underlying general principles of the widest application, which will survive particular technological changes. In the language field, an avoidance of over-specialised vocabulary and fashionable idiom is implied, with priority given to basic competence and a general proficiency.

3.4.3. The adult learner is, however, typically faced with a specific need for a particular language, to be used for specific purposes in certain relatively predictable situations (though in an interaction between people, no one person can control the situation and its development). A BBC TV cameraman, for instance, may learn at a month's notice that he is to make a series of programme in Munich, using German studio facilities. He needs, urgently and rapidly, to learn to produce and understand the restricted language of studio floor control, as it affects the efficient performance of his duties, which he already knows fairly exactly. A French woman of 50 may be going in 9 months' time to stay for some weeks with her son, working for his bank in Zurich, and married to a Swiss girl, with the aim of getting to know the girl and her family, to lay a proper basis for a lasting relation.

3.4.4. If we consider these two cases, we can see that both wish to enter the German language community, but in view of the limited resources (especially of time) available to them, only to a limited extent for limited purposes. The technician requires an apparatus of technical expressions, of orders, signals, reports, stereotyped requests, and needs it whether or not he already "speaks German". If he does, he acquires a specialised extension. If not, he manages to work as a cameraman, but in other respects he may be entirely dependent on the English of the travel industry. The woman will probably be able to talk French with her daughter-in-law, but will want to be able to talk over family matters with the Swiss parents; the affective side of language being perhaps quite as important as the referential.

3.4.5. The needs, motivations and objectives of these two cases are so diverse that there is scarcely anything in common between them. Yet this diversity (and specificity) is probably characteristic of adult learners.

3.4.6. What conclusions can we draw? Firstly, that whereas cost-effectiveness measures may be drawn up for school teaching on the basis of inherent factors, together with those derived from contrastive studies, relative factors predominate in the case of adult learners.

3.5.1. Unit construction must therefore start from the analysis of needs and prior knowledge. It is for this reason that great importance is attached to surveys and investigations into these factors which provide the indispensable data base for intelligent educational planning.

3.5.2. Reasonably accurate prediction of the types of speech event in which the learner will be involved - the behaviours required, the functions to be informed, the notions to be expressed in terms of a restricted universe of discourse, the necessary linguistic resources for their expression and the properties of the situations in which the speech event will be embedded - will enable an optimal selection to be made (within the limits of reasonable expectation) from the categories set up in these dimensions, to maximise communicative potential in the light of the time and (effective) effort available.

3.5.3. Even so, the number of possible quanta and modules is such that considerable freedom is available to course planners in the combinations of factors in quanta, the construction of modules from quanta, and the combination of modules into units. It should again be emphasised that language learning is only to the most limited extent a rehearsal of concrete behaviours, and much more the development of a many-faceted communicative potential, and the skills and strategies for putting it into effect. The concrete teaching materials are but means to that end, and actual test materials means for ascertaining whether it has been achieved.

3.5.4. Ideally, each case requires individual treatment. In practice, a compromise must be reached between the overlapping optima for different learners in a learning system. Large-scale organisation makes available high-cost materials and facilities at a very low per capita cost, but entails the acceptance of a lower Highest Common Factor. Cost and effectiveness are then both reduced. Small-scale operation raises both cost and effectiveness, but excludes the use of high-cost facilities. Optimising the equation, of course, means identifying and exploiting the degrees of freedom in the system, while minimising the negative effects of uncontrollable factors.

4.1.1. The units/credits system attempts to do this in a number of ways.

4.1.2. Firstly, it is hoped that the application of the concepts presented will assist course designers to plan the content of courses multidimensionally. As experience and research accumulate, the value of even a purely conceptual scheme will progressively increase.

4.1.3. Secondly, it will enable the requirements of some statistically significant classes of learner to be articulated in some detail, and facilitate the creation of appropriately oriented courses.

4.1.4. Thirdly, it will encourage educational planners to think of language teaching in terms of a coherent metasystem, integrating various specific courses into an overall pattern.

4.1.5. In particular, it will encourage educational planners to deal with overlapping requirements by exploiting the principle of factorial analysis. It is at this point that the "unit" concept is of major importance. A unit is essentially a principled cluster of modules, which together provide the basis for acquiring the communicative potential to deal with a (substantial) defined language need. The range of needs characterising a particular class of learners can then be met by a corresponding range of units. The overlapping needs of two classes of learners may then be met by the shared use of a proportion of units, and an appropriate selection from other options. "Units" in this sense, may be concrete, i.e. actual sets of fully specified modules, or even concrete learning materials, or abstract, specified as to global content but free as to internal organisation. Clearly the higher the number of classes of learner, the greater the economy of a units system over globally different courses for each, and the greater its effectiveness over a single course for all. It therefore promises an approach to optimal cost-effectiveness.

4.1.6. An overall classification of adult learners in terms of needs can be expressed in unit terms. An examination of the system as a whole will then show that some units are common to many classes of learner, others to very few. Dependent of course on the size of the population in each class, we may say that the set of units common to most learners will constitute the "common core" of the language, those shared by few its "specialist extensions".

4.1.7. In addition, different proficiency levels may be recognised by successive units within the same need-defined area. Language learning is not simply an extension of scope from one behaviour situation and function to another, but also, and particularly, an increase in the power to make distinctions, to handle more complex linguistic material, to operate faster, more accurately and consistently, to increase the availability of items for recall as well as recognition, etc.

5.1.1. There is clearly no possible definitive breakdown of language learning content into a set number of units. The system as detailed so far simply provides a conceptual framework for the planning and evaluation of course objectives and organisation, and of examination syllabuses.

5.1.2. A units-credits system, however, implies that some formal recognition is given to a student for having successfully participated in a course identified with a particular unit, or having otherwise given proof of having mastered the content of that unit.

5.1.3. Many adult educationists deny the usefulness of examinations and qualifications in adult education. Their interest in a units/credits system will be confined to the notion of learning by units.

5.1.4. There is, however, a call for some framework of qualifications to be available to adults who need to demonstrate a language proficiency as a condition of employment.

5.1.5. There are indeed grounds for regarding language proficiency as a "key qualification", necessary to the effective performance of a wide range of functions.

5.1.6. There is also some evidence that motivation is significantly increased by the existence of a terminal assessment.

5.2.1. The units/credits system provides a possible basis for the recognition of language proficiency in various ways.

5.2.2. The multidimensional operational classification provides a framework for the analysis of the content and standard of existing and new examinations and tests and their placement in a system of equivalences.

5.2.3. Content:

(a) Grammatical content: what restrictions, if any, are placed on the knowledge of the morphological and syntactic system of the language expected of the student? What range and degree of complexity of syntactic structure is represented?

(b) Lexical content: What is the size and nature of the vocabulary expected of the student?

(c) Notional-semantic content: What is the range and complexity of the meanings which the student is required to formulate or comprehend?

(d) Communicative functional content: What is the range of communicative functions the candidate is expected to perform or respond to?

(e) Behavioural content: What is the range of language operations that the candidate is required to perform?

(f) Situational content: What is the range of speech situations in which the candidate is required to perform?

(g) How is the content as defined above distributed over the various sub-parts of the examination?

5.2.4. Standard:

Given that the content, and thus the hypothetical standard of the examination, what is demanded of the candidate who is successful in obtaining the various grades awarded for the different language skills in respect of:

- (a) grammatical correctness in the analysis and production of text and utterance;
- (b) correctness of spelling and pronunciation and accuracy of phonetic identification;
- (c) correct choice and interpretation of vocabulary;
- (d) appropriateness of language use and response to linguistic variety;
- (e) richness of expression and range of comprehension;
- (f) fluency in production and immediacy of response?

5.2.5. It is desirable that arrangements be made for the continuous monitoring of existing and new examinations/tests to establish their potential equivalences internationally. Such a task might well be assigned to an existing national centre with adequate technical facilities and which could undertake such a European role.

5.2.6. It is recognised that few, if any, existing examinations are explicit about their content and standard, which resides in a tradition established by continuity of examination over many years. The level of the examination must be deduced from the analysis of papers and marking schemes, which are usually confidential. Equivalences must therefore be established in consultation with, and the full co-operation of, the examining body concerned.

5.2.7. Clearly, the number of levels and streams given separate recognition must, to some extent, be arbitrary, dependent on the need to distinguish reliably between different levels of proficiency which have important social implications. An important aspect of the scheme will be to devise measures which can characterise disparate examinations (and probably no two are exactly alike - the forty modern language examinations conducted in modern languages for adults in Britain appear to involve some 160 distinct tests) meaningfully on a common scale.

5.2.8. In addition to any simple global evaluation, the units/credits system could provide each examination with a "profile", in terms of a functional analysis, which might be available to employers, education authorities (for the selection of students for advanced courses) and other interested persons in a handbook.

5.3.1. If new examinations are assimilated to the units/credits framework, it is greatly to be hoped that a dialogue will precede their introduction so that the concepts of the units/credits system may influence the planning of the examination from an early stage. It must be emphasised, however, that it is not the aim of the scheme to impose a dogmatism or inhibit experimentation.

5.3.2. In addition to recognising initiatives taken by outside bodies to introduce new examinations, the existence of the units/credits system might itself stimulate the introduction of new examinations where existing provision is seen to be inadequate. Preliminary studies indicate certain priority areas.

5.3.3. The first is for examinations, eventually for each CCC language, that will effectively and realistically assess the ability of a candidate to meet the language requirements of everyday living in the country concerned. In particular, an examination, with a rather carefully defined syllabus, success in which will give an assurance to the candidate and other interested persons, that he is able to meet the minimal requirements of everyday living, an examination at once thorough and systematic, but pitched at the lowest effective level. This "threshold level" has been the subject of a number of preliminary studies (van Ek CCC/EES (72) 17 and 72, Wilkins CCC/EES (72) 67, Bung (in progress)) and is regarded as the first priority. It is a suitable target for mass language learning, and can be popularised under the title of "language passport", holders of which can be given various kinds of recognition and advantage. It is envisaged that a special committee should be charged with the implementation of this development.

5.3.4. A second priority project would be to develop examinations specially geared to media-based mass language teaching. These should if possible be compatible with the threshold level examination and given equivalence with it. Indeed, media course planners may adopt the threshold level syllabus as their definitive of content. However, the type of examination envisaged is determined in its scope by what can reasonably be achieved in a given time by learners of a given prior knowledge.

5.3.5. A distinction must be made here between achievement tests and proficiency tests. An achievement test, which establishes whether a student has carried out a specified learning task, is properly geared to a particular course of study with defined content and objective. A proficiency test, on the other hand, establishes whether a student is able to

perform certain operations and is not concerned with the process by which he comes to be able to do so. In the case of proficiency examinations, the difficulty lies in ensuring that the general ability is effectively tested by the sample of language resources and activities which actually appear in the examination. With achievement tests, the problem of sampling remains, but is much reduced. It is difficult however to assess how far success in dealing with the restricted material of the course implies the achievement of the global course objectives. This problem is of considerable importance for the development of the scheme, since one of its prime functions will no doubt be to afford a wider recognition to course-linked examinations in the interests of heightened motivation.

5.3.6. These will include not only large-scale media-based courses, but also, if possible, small scale courses in which students, in consultation with a course leader, determine their own objectives and even their working method. The scheme provides a framework within which the achievements of such students may be evaluated and given appropriate recognition. In this respect, the scheme should not be necessarily tied to terminal examinations, but should consider the evidence afforded by continuous assessment (see Henricson CCC/EES (71) 135, pp. 26-28).

5.3.7. Thirdly come examinations of restricted scope, where for professional purposes only certain functions are needed, not amounting to a global language proficiency. A reading knowledge in one's special field is an obvious example. Another is that of a secretary to a firm with various international connections, who may wish, in each language concerned, to be able to establish telephone connections, understand routine business letters with the aid of a dictionary, etc. Such a person would usefully be able to exercise these functions without even reaching a threshold level overall. The units/credits system can suitably be applied in such cases, allowing the secretary a credit for each language in which certain defined secretarial functions can be carried out, and using that credit towards either a more generalised certificate in the language concerned or towards an international language secretarial qualification. Though this principle has been illustrated at a low proficiency level it is applicable at more advanced levels.

5.4.1. In due course, the scheme may involve the award of certificates and diplomas in the language field. Indeed, any scheme of equivalences should be drawn up with this possibility in mind.

5.4.2. Distinct types of certificate and diploma may be based upon different analysis of learner needs: in some, one language may be studied, more intensively over a narrow compass, or more extensively as to operations and functions at a given linguistic level. In others, languages may be combined with each other, or other studies.

5.4.3. In each language, a range of levels is required. As has been indicated above, the number is largely arbitrary. For practical purposes, five levels appear to underlie common practice, though no individual bodies appear to examine at so many levels. Equally arbitrarily, they may be labelled as follows:

1. threshold,
2. basic,
3. general competence,
4. advanced,
5. full professional standard.

5.4.4. Each level is to be defined by:

- (a) the linguistic resources assumed (grammatical, lexical, including idiom), phonological and phonetic;
- (b) appropriateness of use and response (notional, situational, functional) required;
- (c) accuracy and consistency demanded in production and reception;
- (d) fluency and immediacy required;
- (e) range of linguistic operations involved.

Some global definitions of level (notably the Defense Language Institute's Definitions of Degrees of Language Skills, 1965) are available as a guide but much more research is needed to arrive at a properly operational specification.

5.4.5. Any examinable activity involves an input and an output (stimulus and response), one of which must be, and both of which are usually linguistic in form. The linguistic levels given above determine what may be included by examiners as input (at least to the extent that the candidate's ability to respond critically depends on his prior knowledge of the item concerned) or required as output. Since the input-output relations correspond to language functions, the "modules" of examination activity not only provide evidence on the candidate's level of language proficiency according to the parameters described above, but also give it a certain direction. Since the number of possible "modules" is much greater than can be feasibly incorporated in any single examination, their selection and combination gives a corresponding slant to the assessment of the candidate and the content of teaching, which may or may not be appropriate to his needs. A particular test, such as dictation or even simple repetition of a spoken text, may, if well constructed, have a very high correlation with overall proficiency assessed by a complex battery of tests. It would seem highly economic to have an examination consisting solely of this one simple test. Nevertheless, the effect of doing so might well be disastrous for motivation and for course design.

5.4.6. The units/credits system would essentially involve the preparation of an inventory of examinable activities from which examinations can be constructed, and an assessment of the inherent value of such activities (given appropriate linguistic content) to different classes of learner in the light of their assessed needs. A modular construction of tests may then be considered, so that, in accordance with the general principles of units/credits systems, flexibility may take the form of different groupings of such modules into units, among which different groups of candidates make a distinctive selection. (Dr. Bung's current research is directed to this end.) At any level, certain modules may be so indispensable as indicators of general language proficiency, or of such universal inherent utility, that they form a necessary component of any certificate or diploma implying a general language proficiency at a particular level. These will be grouped into units constituting the "common core" of such qualifications. In particular, they will contain tests of the ability of the candidate to comprehend and express, by means of the linguistic resources appropriate to that level, basic semantico-notional content to an appropriate degree of delicacy, and to perform appropriately those communicative functions which are the stuff of linguistic intercourse and least bound to specialised situations and needs. The system of semantico-notional categories and categories of communicative function elaborated by Wilkins (CCC/EES (72) 67) should be further developed and applied to successive proficiency levels on the principle that advance from one level to another involves not simply an extension of range across situations and towards higher degrees of abstraction, but also a "recycling" whereby further distinctions are made in semantic fields and communicative functions already covered in a grosser way at a lower level.

5.5.1. Associated with common core units at each level, certificates and diplomas of a purely linguistic character should also allow for options between units which require the candidate's linguistic proficiency to be brought to bear upon particular fields of activity which are not of universal concern, but are important for the life of some learners. These applications of proficiency are important parts of a learner-centred, motivation-based approach. As they are neither mutually exclusive nor hierarchically ordered with respect to each other, it should be possible to add any number of them as endorsements for credit to a basic certificate or diploma. Optional units of this kind should not be confined to the vocationally useful, but should contain options of a cultural nature. In accordance with the general principles of permanent education, strong encouragement should be given to candidates (short, perhaps of actual compulsion) to include at least one cultural option in their preparation for a diploma.

5.5.2. Consideration should also be given to the possibility of using the optional units, at different levels, in order to introduce a language component into certificates and diplomas, not primarily aimed at language proficiency, which might be introduced as part of a wider units/credits system for permanent education in Europe. For example, a diploma in European studies might contain one or more language units along with others relating to European history, art and architecture, social economic and political structure, commercial and industrial life, literature and philosophy. Such a diploma would have no necessary ordering among its units and language credits, or endorsements, could be taken at any time.

5.5.3. Again, a close analysis of the language functions useful to the performance of some class of job at different levels would provide a basis for language units which would form part of a language diploma or a vocational diploma. As an example, we may consider the case of the language skills which may be required in secretarial work in a firm or other body with international connections. Among the language activities that may be involved are the following:

- (a) copy-typing of a foreign language (FL) text from print;
- (b) typing of a letter from a longhand FL script;
- (c) typing of an FL letter from dictation, taken down in longhand;
- (d) typing of an FL letter from dictation, using an FL shorthand system;
- (e) typing of a standard letter in an FL giving precise instructions as to its content, but not a literal dictation;
- (f) typing of a standard letter in an FL, given general instructions as to content;
- (g) typed acknowledgements in an FL according to a standard procedure but without any specific instructions;
- (h) composing non-standard letters in an FL from an LI original, involving close translation;
- (i) composing non-standard letters in an FL, given precise instructions as to content, but no text;
- (j) composing non-standard letters in an FL given only general instructions regarding its content;
- (k) abstracting the gist of an FL letter in LI;

- (l) providing a close translation of an FL letter in LI;
- (m) sending an FL telegram by telephone;
- (n) composing an FL telegram from an LI text, or instructions;
- (o) establishing telephonic connections with FL contacts (in and out);
- (p) giving and receiving FL telephone messages;
- (q) greeting and entertaining FL visitors;
- (r) answering queries from FL clients;
- (s) booking travel accommodation in FL;
- (t) interpreting at a business conference from FL to LI;
- (u) interpreting at a business conference from LI to FL.

5.5.4. It is clear that these activities (the list is unlikely to be complete) vary greatly in the demands they make upon a secretary. They may also be further differentiated according to the linguistic range and complexity of the letters, texts and messages concerned, the variety of situations and kinds of personal relations involved, the clarity of input, the speed, accuracy and reliability of work demanded. A personal assistant who can perform all these tasks to a high standard on a bilingual basis is a highly skilled professional worker, and commands so high a salary that no firm could employ her unless her skills were in constant demand. A small firm, only part of whose work involves intermittent foreign contacts might prefer a secretary to be able to deal competently if slowly with only the more elementary operations and call in professional assistance where necessary.

5.5.5. Modules can be established for each of these secretarial tasks, differentiated in appropriate cases according to the linguistic level of the input and output, and the degree of skill demanded. The modules can be grouped into units at the same level for convenience of examining, and the units combined into certificates and diplomas. At the highest levels (say 4 and 5), the content is sufficient to justify an autonomous diploma. Level 4 might require full control of the actual secretarial skills involved, with a modicum of straight-forward interpretation. Level 5 might then add to that a full mastery of the language in not only straight-forward but also unforeseen and complex situations involving the exercise of judgment and discretion and control over their linguistic expression as well as a range of styles and an ability to communicate effectively under adverse conditions. At lower levels, the restrictions of range, knowledge and skill would mean that the credit obtained would be capitalisable as part of a wider qualification.

5.5.6. It must of course be borne in mind that the job demands upon a secretary may vary widely from one country to another, and that the linguistic content will be dependent on the nature of the business of the firm by which the secretary is employed. Flexibility between modules is therefore all the more necessary.

5.5.7. There appears to be no serious objection to the accumulation of credits required for such certificates and diplomas over a period of time. The actual structure of each vocational units/credits cluster would, of course, depend on an accurate job-analysis, and should be arrived at in each case by an ad hoc committee containing, say, representatives of the profession concerned (employers and employees), institutions involved in teaching modern languages to that profession, and associations of teachers, in addition to members familiar with the units/credits system as a whole. It is important to preserve the basic objectives of the scheme, and while deriving benefit from the experience of practitioners, to bear in mind the universal human tendency to think within the confines of the structure with whose operations one is familiar, and even identified.

6.1 Since a fully-fledged units/credits system requires full specification of linguistic, notional, situational and functional content, division into possible modules, their combination into units at different levels and the accumulation of credits for a range of certificates and diplomas, it is unrealistic to expect that the system can be perfected in a short time. Yet large-scale media-based language-learning programmes have been launched or are being considered in a number of countries. How is the scheme to be developed and implemented quickly enough for it not to be simply left behind by events? We must be prepared to pursue short-term practical objectives energetically and, at the same time, long-term objectives clear-sightedly.

6.2 For this long-term perspective, the continued collection of information on the state of adult language learning and the decision-making bodies whose co-operation may be needed continues to be important, as does most certainly the encouragement of surveys and enquiries on a national and international scale, into adult language needs and motivations. In view of the great value to such a programme of the accumulated experience of successive investigations, a group of experts should be established to stimulate and guide fresh surveys, in the light of a developing model (cf. Richterich, CCC/EES (72) 49). This group of experts might also consider how to investigate the effectiveness of multi-media courses, especially those organised along the lines indicated by the units/credits approach.

6.3 Finally, as the objectives of language learning are made more explicit, and the structure of language examinations becomes more functional, the implication for course construction, especially for the organisation of large-scale multi-media

courses, should be thoroughly explored, as envisaged in the phased plan of work, in order to harness the large-scale resources of mass-media to achieve significant economies of scale. Television, radio, tapes, discs, books, realia, courses, counselling services, study groups, tests and examinations can be brought together into a single integrated learning system.

The units/credits system can contribute effectively to this development by giving international recognition to such courses and thus giving them a wider international use, which in turn radically reduces costs.

6.4. As the units/credits system matures, it will doubtless be necessary to establish some kind of supervisory body to exercise such functions as the award of internationally recognised credits. A number of organisations actively involved, or whose interests were affected, would properly be represented. Any such administrative scheme would clearly require careful consideration and negotiation in the conditions of the time, at both national and international level.

7.1. Immediate priority, however, attaches to the further development of analytic categories, the closer definition of needs and levels and the detailed elaboration of modules and units, to provide the necessary basis for a full range of learning and testing materials in appropriate media, upon which an integrated international language learning system must depend.

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